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# The Problem of the Mobilization of the Soviet Army

1. The attached table is an estimate of the manpower resources available to the Soviet Union at the beginning of the Second World War. It was compiled on the basis of personal observations of the author, interrogations of former Soviet officers, and several sources familiar with the mobilization problems of the old Imperial Russian Army. The table does not, in any fashion, pretend to be without gaps or to be absolutely accurate, but its figures are a reasonable approximation of the truth. The author estimates that this approximation is of the order of plus or minus five percent.
2. The figures arrived at in the final computation have been verified by other methods of calculation. These methods include a comparison of the maximum proportion of men mobilized to the total population, and a comparison of those suitable for service to the total male population. A possible figure for the number mobilized was furnished indirectly by Voznesenski in his book "The Soviet Economy During the Great Patriotic War", in which he indicated that in 1944 more than 70 percent of workers and employees in the U.S.S.R. were women or adolescents. Finally, General Marshall in his report to the President of the United States indicated the number of men mobilized. According to him, there were 27,000,000 such in the Soviet Union. In the calculation of the enclosed table no account has been taken of the number of women mobilized into the army, the number of which was, according to the most modest estimates, however, between 700,000 and 800,000.

### Observations Concerning the Columns of the Table

3. Columns 2 and 3 call for no particular discussion. It is recognized that the increase of male population is constantly equal to 48 percent of the total increase in population. The sagging or augmentation of the total population increase has been calculated, bearing in mind, approximately, the condition of the country in this or that year, wars, economic conditions, epidemics, harvests, etc.
4. Columns 5 and 6. For "normal" years, in other words, without wars or epidemics and with good harvests, the minimum rate of rejection for physical disqualification has been accepted for approximation as being 2.5 percent

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of the total increase of male population. By "rejected" is meant those men who have been recognized as unfit for service, removed from the military lists, and thenceforth are not counted in the manpower resources for mobilization. For certain years the percentage of rejection is clearly greater. For men born in 1916 it is five percent; for those born in 1920 the rate is 15 percent; and for those born in 1918 it is 12 percent.

5. Column 7 lists the number of men subject to call. This figure results from the subtraction of the figure in Column 6 from that given in Column 3.
6. Columns 8 and 9. Column 8 lists the percentage of men (in relation to the figure in Column 7) who have obtained deferment. Column 9 expresses in figures the percentages carried in Column 8. Men obtaining a temporary or permanent deferment, for whatever reason, are not removed from the military lists. In the old Imperial Army such men were immediately shunted into the reserve and the general levy. During war the reserve could be called-up in its entirety, and the general levy in part.
7. No entries have been made in Columns 8 and 9 for the years of birth 1900 and 1901 because these classes were never fully called, either by the Empire or by the Soviet Government. During the civil war, some men born in 1900 and 1901 were called to service by the two adversaries. These calls were only partial, and not more than 50 percent of men born in the years in question were affected. For the calculation and determination of the number of men "trained", "partially trained", and "untrained" (Columns 17, 18, 19) 40 percent of the total number of male births during these years has been taken as representing the number mobilized during the civil war. Under the Soviet regime all men born in 1900 and 1901 were placed in the first reserve. Normal conscription was started in 1924, when men born in 1902 and 1903 were summoned.
8. In Column 10 is listed an approximate calculation separating from the number of eligibles the cadres of active troops. About half of the class affected served in the army or the navy. Normally, neither under the Empire, nor in the first years of the Soviet regime, did the army absorb the total annual class. It was not until 1937-38 that the whole class was called into service, and even this was not sufficient, so that it was felt necessary to call older men to the colors, under the pretext of "great training assemblies" or by way of an official partial mobilization as was the case during the Finnish campaign and at the outbreak of the German-Soviet war.
9. In Column 11 is listed that portion of the class which is called into formations not belonging to the army or navy. Under the Empire these men, like all those exempted, were put into the reserve. At the beginning of the Soviet regime they were given brief military training outside of the army by the military Commissariats or by the "transitory cadres" of territorial units. At the beginning of the thirties these units were dissolved, and replaced by new units of the army.
10. Column 11 lists fractional figures for the call-ups for the years 1906 to 1913. The numerator indicates the number of men called to the colors during the First World War. These were considered during the first period of Soviet rule to be "trained" reserves, and later, with the growing perfection of military techniques and the impossibility of giving these men further periods of instruction, as "partially trained" reserves. The denominator indicates the number of men not called during the First World War who were left to the national economy under the heading "margin of security". For the class of 1913 and all following classes this margin was reduced to a minimum. In parentheses, following the denominator, is indicated the percentage of the margin, which includes the reserve and the general levy.
11. In Column 12 are listed the losses suffered during the First World War. They are calculated on the following bases: 1) Total of irreparable losses (killed and crippled so as to be unfit for service, died from the consequences of wounds, etc.) evaluated at 1,600,000 men. This figure represents all the classes which served during the war. Of this figure 70.5 percent of the casualties were suffered by the classes called up between 1906 and 1917, although these classes totaled less than three-quarters of those called to service

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(sic). 2) The losses were distributed unequally among the various age groups. It is obviously natural that the men called to duty in 1912 and 1913, being in the army at the time of the declaration of war, suffered heavier losses than those of the class of 1902, for example. In Column 12, in parentheses, is indicated an approximate percentage of the losses of the class concerned. The losses of the class called in 1915 are calculated as at least  $1\frac{1}{2}$  percent; those of the class called in 1917 as  $\frac{1}{2}$  percent; in fact they were less.

12. For subsequent calculations the list of losses has been deducted from the figures in Column 7, making allowances for those exempted from service, the number of which is indicated in the denominator of the fraction listed in Column 11.
13. Column 13. These figures have been derived in the following manner: In 1919-20 there were 37 classes in the age group 19 to 55; some three million men were lost during the civil war, the emigration of the White armies, the separation of former Russian territories such as Poland and Finland, epidemics, and famines. Of these 37 classes, the table lists only the 17 which are of interest to us. To simplify the calculation, the three million has been divided by 37 to find the average loss per age group; the figure obtained is 61,765.
14. Columns 14 and 15 list the losses due to natural causes, and their proportion to the total of the age group. They have been calculated in the following manner. Taking as a base the figures in Column 3, the figures in Columns 12 and 13 have been subtracted. The percentage of natural losses (decease, extermination in concentration camps, etc.) is calculated in relation to the figure thus obtained. The numerical value of the percentage is then calculated. For different age groups the percentage of natural losses is not the same. This is due to the fact that among the men who have reached 55 in 1940 the percentage of losses will be higher than among those who have reached 25 or 30 at the same time.
15. Column 16 lists the results of the following calculation. The figures in Column 7 have been taken as a base, from which the total losses appearing in Columns 12, 13, and 15 have been deducted. The result is the number of men, 19 to 55, who were on the military lists in 1940, not taking into consideration for the moment whether they are "trained", "partially trained", or "untrained".
16. As a result of the calculations, the number of men on the military lists at the end of 1940 was 28,916,655; in round figures, 29,000,000. The age breakdown is as follows:

20 to 30	-	10,353,804
31 to 40	-	9,813,607
41 to 45	-	3,519,706
46 to 50	-	2,612,209
51 to 55	-	2,613,329
17. The figure of 29,000,000 men on the military lists in 1940 is probably very close to the truth, and will serve as a point of departure for the evaluation of the manpower reserves available for mobilization today. The detailed calculations will not be given here, but the general pattern is as follows:
  - a. The Soviets officially admit that their losses during the 1941-45 war total 7,000,000. It is felt, however, that this figure is far too low. The number of prisoners who died in Germany during the winter of 1941-42 is alone more than three million. If one increases this stated figure of 7,000,000 by only 50 percent, a total of 10,500,000 is reached, which is much more plausible.
  - b. During a war, the larger percentage of losses affects not the older age groups, but the middle and younger groups. It is the most active portion of the armed forces which perishes. It may be remarked in passing that this is an argument against those military writers who even today continue to speak with assurance about the "limitless human resources" available for mobilization by the Soviet Union. It is the opinion of the author that the situation in that country, as far as manpower is concerned, is far from bright.
  - c. Those men who at the end of 1940 were 45 years old will be age 55 in 1950, and will definitely be removed from the military lists. For this reason the last eleven age groups, representing at least 5,000,000 men, must be excluded from the present calculations.

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- d. During the war men born in 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, and some of those born in 1927, were called to the colors, a total of 4,000,000 to 4,500,000 men. This total is due to the fact that the years 1921, 1922, and to some degree 1923 and even 1924 were unfavorable years from the standpoint of population increase. 1925 and 1926 were more favorable, as were also the years of the expansion of the New Economic Policy up until 1929. If to the abovementioned figure of 4,000,000 are added the rest of the class of 1927 as well as the classes of 1928 and 1929 (this latter will shortly be called) a total of 6,000,000 to 6,500,000 is reached, including those who were called up during the war.
- e. From the total of draftees it is necessary to deduct a number representing the losses of the civilian population (the percentage which applies to draftees) during the German occupation, from deportation of labor, and from the refusal of numerous Soviet citizens to return to their homeland. The total might be estimated, very approximately, at 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 men.
18. Proceeding by this method of calculation to evaluate the manpower mobilization resources of the Soviet Union today, it is estimated that the number of draftees during and since the war is equal to the number removed from the military lists, enumerated above. It is now possible to make an abstract of the two series of figures.
19. Taking as a base the figure of 29,000,000 men, 10,500,000 are deducted; the difference of 18,500,000 is the number of men estimated to be on the military lists. If, of these 18,500,000 men, not less than 5,000,000 are reserved for the national economy, the maximum number of men available for mobilization will be of the order of 13,500,000.
20. The fact that the national economy requires a minimum of 5,000,000 men may be confirmed by the following calculation. According to statistical data, the total number of workers and employees in the USSR is 27,000,000 persons. If out of this number only 18 to 20 percent are considered as forming an irreducible skeleton cadre, this would amount to 5,000,000. This explains the anxiety of the Soviet Government, which finds it necessary at present to conscript adolescents for trade schools, and strictly to regiment the professions quantitatively. In the event of an early outbreak of hostilities it would be necessary to remove the students from the trade schools, and to free for military service the entire male population.
21. The categories in Columns 17, 18, and 19 are derived as follows: All the men conscripted between 1930 and 1939 who have completed normal training courses in the army or navy are listed as "trained". Men having had training in territorial units or having received military instruction outside of the army (about 60 percent of the men not having had military service) are listed as "partially trained". Also listed in the same category are men of the older age classes, veterans of the First World War if they have not had refresher training courses in the years immediately preceding the Second World War (of which there were very few cases). All other men are listed under the heading "untrained".
22. In the total of 29,000,000 men which it has been calculated were on the military lists in 1940, no attempt has been made to distinguish the officers of the various arms and services, because of the impossibility of estimating any such figures, even approximately. As an "off-the-cuff" calculation, however, it is felt that in the existing state of military technique in the USSR a large unit would need to be composed of about eight percent officers of all grades. Using the figures of General Marshall, according to which the USSR mobilized 27,000,000 men during the war, it would seem that for the combined total of the army and navy about ten percent of the personnel would have to be officers, or, roughly speaking, about 2,000,000.
23. It is very important to be able to indicate the approximate number of officers in the Soviet army, but it cannot be done. It is possible to say, however, that the number of officers has always been significantly lower than the number required despite the high output of the military schools. If it is accepted that the Soviet Union has about 200 military schools of all types and for all services, and that the annual graduation of each is about 250 young officers, then in the last twenty years the total number would be 700,000 to 800,000.

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24. In calculating the resources which may be mobilized for the direct needs of combat and for the rear services it is necessary to deduct the very large forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (militia, firemen, border guards, camp guards, factory guards, guards for various installations, etc.) and also those of the Ministry of State Security. These troops are not listed in the category "margin of security", into which falls the vast and heavy bureaucracy of the Party and the Government.
25. The largest percentage of the "margin of security" has been reserved for the organs of the Party and the Government, for the principal organs of industry (Ministries, Trusts, Directorates, etc.). For these bodies the "margin of security" reaches some 50 percent of the total number of employees and directors. A high percentage of margin has been established for industries such as machine construction, metallurgy, petroleum, munitions, etc. In these enterprises the deferment frequently reaches 60 percent.
26. The railroads have been mobilized, and all their personnel remain at work, being considered as soldiers. Many industrial enterprises, especially those occupied with war production, are also considered as having been mobilized.
27. The lowest percentage of "margin of security" applies to local industries, textile industries, and footwear industries, with the exception of those filling army needs. For all practical purposes there is no "margin of security" for agriculture, the machine-tractor stations, sovkhozy, and the enterprises of the gustatory industry.
28. In many cases the margin of security for workers and technicians has resulted in errors of misplacement, such as took place in 1941 and 1942 when it became necessary to release from service officers and soldiers who were technicians and specialists and return them to the factories.
29. It is estimated that as a minimum for the total economy of the USSR the "margin of security" absorbed 20 to 30 percent of the workers, technicians, engineers, and employees. This relatively low percentage was obtained not at the expense of heavy industry, but to the detriment of agriculture and local industry.
30. In the years preceding the war almost nobody was exempted from military service, for two main reasons:
  - a. Before the war the desired rate of increase in army effectives was such that the number of conscripts was insufficient to satisfy the planned personnel needs of the army and navy. From then on, no further allowances were made for the fact that the departure of a family's breadwinner would leave aged parents, young mothers, or infant children without means of support.
  - b. Naturally it was not admitted that the army was short of men, and the call to the colors was explained by the fact that the kolkhoz could support the families in the absence of their normal supporters.
31. The rare exceptions were those cases in which the conscript would have left small children without care, and these were always considered on an individual basis. However, even in these cases, the draftees received only a deferment of six months or at most a year "to adjust his personal affairs", with the obligation to place the children in a children's home. Simultaneously the age limit for parents was raised five years, so that both men and women were liable to serve up to the age of 55. Student deferments were cancelled. Those deferments granted to permit completion of scientific work became exceedingly rare, and if they were renewed for one year the recipient was transferred into the first reserve.
32. Up to 1938 the Soviet mobilization regulations provided for two categories of reserves: first reserve, up to age 35; second reserve, from 36 to 45. In 1938 the following modifications were introduced: a) the age limit of military obligation was raised from 45 to 50 years of age; b) the age limit of the first reserve was raised from 35 to 39; c) the age limit of the second reserve was raised from 45 to 50; d) a reserve of ages 51 to 55 was created, to be called up for internal guard duties in case of extreme need. All these measures were adopted not by constitutional methods, but by means of Government decrees made at the suggestion of the Minister of War.

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33. Men carried as on active duty, but actually on extended periods of leave, were not called for training periods prior to five years of service. Men in the first reserve were called for training periods, but there was no exact system for such calls, despite the fact that the mobilization regulations provided for such calls for the first reserve at least once in three years. It was also provided that men in the second reserve would be called up once in five years. For all practical purposes these regulations were not enforced after 1935, when new units were formed in the army. The need to carry out these training periods was determined by the general plan for mobilization and the existence in the district of trained reserves. If, for example, the General Staff plan specified the raising of ten instead of five divisions from the Volga District, the District, under the orders of the mobilization section of the General Staff, would organize a series of training periods for existing units and formations.
34. Normally the training periods took place during the intervals between agricultural seasons, roughly between 15 May and 15 July, and then again between 15 December and 1 March. The major training assemblies, which at bottom were really camouflaged mobilizations, took place without regard to the agricultural seasons. Such assemblies took place during the Finnish campaign, and before the war in 1941. These latter began in December 1940, and partially in January and February 1941, and continued up to the moment the units were sent to the front.
35. The general mobilization of the army and the creation of new units proceeded according to the following general scheme:
  - a. The mobilization complement was assigned to active units, to transform them into wartime effectives. According to regulations these were to be called "active units" (cadre units). At times they were designated as being front line formations, although this designation was usually applied to units created by mobilization, using active units as cadres.
  - b. The complement of active units was usually made up of men of the first reserve, without necessarily adhering closely to age classes. It made no difference whether the reservist was 30 or 37 years old. It is true, however, that each time the General Staff issued orders concerning complements to be filled that it specified the classes to be used.
  - c. The formation of front line units was effectuated with men called up in the mobilization.
36. The prewar mobilization plan foresaw the call to the colors of twelve classes, of which four were to be second reserve, so as not to drain the first reserve. The figure established was not the same for all the military districts. For some, such as Moscow, Eastern Siberia, and Western Siberia it was intended to affect thirty classes, while for others, such as the Ural, Volga, Orel, and Kharkov, twelve classes were to be called, and for some of the frontier districts, fifteen classes.
37. It is very difficult to discover what the system for the formation of second-line units was supposed to be, because the front line units in the frontier and adjacent districts had already been disrupted by the rapidity of the German advance, as well as by the influx of conscripts which was not halted in time at intermediary centers. From the fourth to the seventh day of mobilization tens of thousands of conscripts from the industrial centers fell into enemy hands without even having donned uniform, received arms, or joined their units.
38. Even if the first units mobilized had gotten under way simultaneously throughout the country when the mobilization decree was issued, the following units could not have been called up at the same rate in all the districts. Each district had its own particular schedule for the formation of new units, and each of these units had a mobilization plan of its own.
39. The placing of active units on a war footing was assured as far as material, armament, and equipment were concerned by the supplies in storage. For front line units the equipment was in district depots. These stocks were put at the disposal of the Commander and the General Staff of the district

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as a reserve during the mobilization of front line units. Second-line and following formations were supplied by central depots located in the various districts but not subordinate to the commanders of those districts. Even the guard of these depots was not under the district commander, but entrusted to MVD units. The military districts disposed of nothing but plans for the complement of active units and the creation of front line units, and were even ignorant of the succeeding steps in the mobilization.

40. The mobilization of reservists in the Soviet Army is on a non-territorial basis, which involves the large-scale use of railways. The call to the colors and the discharge both took place in the autumn, and the majority of the movements were accomplished by rail. Air transport was definitely not employed, and water transport only on a limited scale and for short distances, primarily in the Volga basin.
41. The essential rail lines used for the transport of conscripts were: Moscow-Smolensk-Minsk-Bialystok; Kiev-Zhitomir-Lvov; Moscow-Donbas-North Caucasus; Moscow-West Siberia-Far East; Kazakhstan-Ural (via Omsk and Sverdlovsk)-Chelyabinsk; Central Asia-West Siberia; etc. These were the routes involved, but it is obvious that not every train traversed the entire route.

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